

OCTOBER 21, 1976

We started hearing in the summer that screwworms had broken out down toward the Rio Grande. Deep south herders began sending sad tales of the losses after the July rains. By September, the Shortgrass Country started having many cases that the horn flies and internal parasites were set back. Once again, we returned to leaving in the morning working off a tally book and ending up in the evening subtracting the death toll.

I don't know how many cases of worms have been reported in the area. The county agent may know, as he hands out the bottles to send in the specimens for identification. As he doesn't have anything but club lambs to look after, he probably has time to keep accurate book on the screwworm situation.

As for the hombres sending in the samples, I wouldn't trust them to keep up with their hats, much less inventory screwworm cases. After calves made that dramatic slump about two weeks ago, then rallied, hombres out here were still in such a state of shock that the ones who weren't mumbling to themselves were suffering so bad from biting their lips they couldn't make a sound.

Research teams say the reason the screwworm program has broken down is due to the inactive nature of the sterile flies. Hot house flies, they've learned, don't move around as much as the native breed that lives on the rangelands.

In the boxes that are used to distribute the flies, I've seen a lot of dead ones that never did move around at all. I suppose that being dropped from an airship is as hard on a fly as on anything else. I know one time a fellow painting a house over at Mertz on stepped off his ladder. After the fall, his wife had to buy a sewing machine to support the family. The only painting he'd contract was the underpinning on low-rise apartments. Closest he ever came again to climbing a ladder was getting on a bus to visit the flatlands out in Arizona.

I am afraid we are going to produce more wild flies this fall in the pastures than the research center can manufacture at Mission. Two outfits south of the ranch dehorned and castrated their calves last week. Unless a hard frost hits soon, those two strings of calves will host enough screwworm eggs to re-infest Texas and four of the major southern states.

On the same day the calves were worked, I talked to a neighbor of theirs who had just finished spending \$55 spraying his calves to prevent screwworms. He was awful displeased about the whole matter, until I made him understand that it doesn't have to be the consumer who eats us out of the cattle glut.

Every outlet for our product counts. The manufacturers of artificial fertilizer never have realized how much they were helped by the lowly tumblebug rolling off fresh manure. I'm not going to turn down any deal that'll get rid of the surplus. We might be better off in the end to give benefit suppers for people that'll dehorn during the worm season.

Screwworms don't only kill cattle and sheep. They cause other trouble. One of my partners has a top roping mare that got infected. She'd been fighting across the fence with a stud horse. Before my compadre knew what had happened, she had a bad case from the wire cuts.

You know how torn up a horse lover and roper can get over their mounts. If old Coronado and those other Spanish explorers had paid as much attention to their horses as people do today, they'd have been lucky to have discovered that the coast of Spain joined the ocean.

Anyhow, I listened to his troubles. Time and reason sort of drifted away. Next thing I knew he was offering to give me his studhorse.

Now I want to make this clear right now. Old Ned's kitchen may need a frost free icebox some day. Deep mysteries and grand marvels may be explained and solved. Mars, the distant planet, could well be settled and covered in franchise houses. But for now and forever, I am not going to own, harbor, halter or rent a stud horse.

It does show you the amount of trouble screwworms can cause. It's been a long time since we wanted an early frost. I think we are going to survive unless autumn dehorning becomes a custom.